Rules of the Game
All About Mounts (Part One)
By Skip Williams

In a world that lacks mechanized transportation, such as the typical **D&D** campaign world, mounts provide the basic means of transportation. Normally, climbing aboard a steed and riding off to some destination, near or far, doesn't pose much of a problem for players and DMs. Unfortunately, player characters seldom take quiet rides in the country -- they tend to find trouble. This series focuses on how a mount functions during the rigors of adventuring.

Basics of Mounts

The basics of mounts are well scattered through the rules. Important stops on our road to understanding mounts include the description of the Ride skill on page 80 in the *Player's Handbook,* the rules for mounted combat on page 157 of the *Player's Handbook,* and the rules for mounts on pages 204-205 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Here's an overview:

- A mount must be at least one size category bigger than the rider.

  Many creatures have the Strength to carry another creature of the same size category, but the game places severe restrictions on which creatures can share space on the battlefield with others (see next point).

  Even if a creature is one or more size categories bigger than you, it can't serve as your mount if it lacks the Strength to carry you and your gear.

- A mount and rider share the same space on the battlefield.

  For all game purposes, you and your mount function as a single unit on the battlefield. Your mount continues to use its own space and reach while carrying you. You effectively use your mount's space and your own reach (or whatever extended reach your weapon gives you) while mounted. While you're mounted, any attack that can reach a square in the space you and your mount jointly occupy can affect you or your mount (it doesn't make a difference which square). Likewise, you measure your reach for your melee attacks and the range for your ranged attacks from any square you and your mount jointly occupy. You don't get cover from your mount unless you use the Ride skill to get it, and your mount doesn't block your attacks and provide your foes with cover.

  Normally, you and an ally cannot share the same space on the battlefield unless one of you is helpless or a lot bigger than the other (see page 148 in the *Player's Handbook* and page 29 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide).*

- Your mount handles movement for you.

  When your mount moves, you move along with it, which means that you're using your mount's speed

rating. Your mount, however, is actually doing the moving, and that leaves you free to do something else while your mount moves, such as making a ranged attack. You can't always act effectively while your mount moves, however. For example, if your mount moves more than 5 feet and you make a melee attack in the same round, you can make only a single attack.

- You continue to move with your mount until you fall off the mount or deliberately dismount.

- You and your mount act on the same initiative count.

  When you're riding a mount, roll initiative normally. When your turn comes in the initiative order, you and your mount act together. Riding an untrained mount in a battle can keep you from acting. If your mount is smart enough to act on its own, it might function as an NPC and keep its own initiative number, which could prove inconvenient for you (see Intelligent Mounts in Part Five for details).

- A mount can give you an advantage in melee.

  If you're mounted and you make a melee attack against a foe that is on foot (that is, not mounted itself) and who is one or more size categories smaller than your mount, you get a +1 bonus on your attack roll for being on higher ground. If the creature you attack is on higher ground than you and your mount, you don't get a bonus on your melee attack.

Moving While Mounted

When you and your mount move, the two of you use your mount's speed rating, adjusted for the mount's encumbrance and the terrain. Because your mount takes you along with it when it moves, a move for your mount also counts as a move for you. (See Rules of the Game, All About Movement for notes on what constitutes movement.) Even though you're not propelling yourself, you still spend time moving. So, for example, if you and your mount move, neither you nor your mount can take a 5-foot step during the same turn.

You can make Ride checks to affect your mount's movement, as noted in the Ride skill description and summarized below:

Leap: You can get your mount to leap obstacles as part of its movement. Although it's not entirely clear from the Ride skill description, there are two elements to urging your mount to leap. First, you must use either your mount's Jump bonus (which includes an adjustment for the mount's speed rating; see the Jump skill description) or your Ride bonus (which does not include an adjustment for your mount's speed), whichever is lower, to determine how far or how high the mount can jump with you aboard.

When using your mount's Jump bonus, you also must succeed on a DC 15 Ride check. If you fail this check, you fall off the mount when it leaps. It's best to assume that you fall off wherever the mount begins the jump and that the mount does not attempt the jump if you fail to stay on.

If you use your Ride bonus to determine the distance your mount jumps, handle the check exactly the same way you'd handle the check using the mount's own Jump bonus, but you still fall off (as noted above) if your check result isn't at least 15.

Urging your mount to jump isn't an action for you, but it's part of your mount's movement.

Spurring Your Mount: You can spur your mount to greater speed with a DC 15 Ride check. This is a move action for you. If you succeed, your mount's speed increases by 10 feet for 1 round. It's easiest to add the increase directly to your mount's current speed rating, whatever that happens to be. Normally, you add speed increases to a creature's base speed, then apply reductions for the creature's armor or load (see page 147 in the *Player's Handbook*). Increasing your mount's speed damages the mount, as noted in the Ride skill description.

If you fail the check to spur your mount, you still use a move action. Your mount doesn't get a speed increase, but it doesn't take any damage.

In either case, the move action you use to spur your mount takes place along with your mount's movement and does not affect the actions your mount can use. For example, you can use a move action to spur your mount and your mount could still take a double move, or move and attack.

Spurring and Leaping: Because urging your mount to leap isn't an action for you, you can spur your mount to greater speed and urge it to leap during the same turn. You still use a move action to spur your mount. If you successfully spur your mount to greater speed (and it survives the resulting damage), use the increased speed to determine your mount's Jump bonus; you still might wind up using your Ride bonus for the jump if it's lower than your mount's Jump bonus (see the section on leaping).

Mounting or Dismounting: It takes a move action from you to get on or off your mount. The act of mounting or dismounting doesn't count as movement for you (see Rules of the Game, [All About Movement](#); however, you must enter your mount's space to mount or exit the mount's space to dismount. You can enter or exit the mount's space as a 5-foot step (if the situation allows a 5-foot step) or as part of your normal movement. For example, if your speed is 30 and your mount is 30 feet away or less, you use one move action to reach the mount's space and a second move action to mount. If your mount has made more than a single move with you aboard this round, you don't have time left to dismount unless you use the Ride skill to make a fast dismount. Likewise, if you and your mount begin the round apart and the mount uses more than a single move to get into a position where you can mount, you don't have time left to do anything this round after mounting, but you could do something else while waiting for your mount to arrive.

Falling and Mounts

If you and your mount fall down (as you might if the two of you step off a cliff or blunder into a pit), you and your mount take damage based on the distance you fall, as noted on page 303 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

If you fall off your mount, or your mount drops from under you, you could avoid or reduce the damage.

Your Mount Falls: If your mount trips or falls down for any reason, you must succeed on a DC 15 Ride check to make a soft fall and take no damage (you sort of use the mount as a shock absorber). If the check fails, you take 1d6 points of damage. This assumes your mount was moving or standing on the ground when it fell and that the mount is one size category bigger than you. Your DM might call for more damage if your mount is really big (see Part 5). If your mount was flying when it falls, you fall from whatever altitude you and your mount had attained when the mount fell (your mount isn't that good a shock absorber).

You Fall: If you fall off your mount (usually because of a failed Ride check) when the mount is moving along the ground, you take 1d6 points of damage when you hit the ground. If your mount was more than one size category bigger than you, you might take more damage (see Part Five). In either case, you can attempt a DC 15 Ride

check to soften the fall and take no damage (you use the mount as a brake).

If your mount was flying when you fall, you take falling damage according to your altitude and take the appropriate falling damage.

You Are Dropped: If you are knocked unconscious while mounted, you have a 50% chance to stay in the saddle (or 75% if you're in a military saddle). Otherwise you fall and take 1d6 points of damage (or more if your mount is really big -- see Part Five). If you're riding bareback and you're unconscious, you automatically fall off.

What's Next?

That pretty well covers the basics of mounts and mounted movement. Next week, we'll consider what happens when you and your mount enter a battle.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon* *Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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